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Second week of campaign ends with Trudeau rally cancelled for safety concerns

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The Liberal campaign cancelled an early evening rally Friday after an unruly group of demonstrators denouncing Justin Trudeau and pandemic policies set off security concerns, with Trudeau himself saying that going ahead with the event would have put people at risk.

Dozens of local Liberal supporters, some with young children and dogs, gathered in a hotel parking lot in Bolton, Ont., northwest of Toronto, to hear Trudeau speak.

Dozens of protesters followed the Liberal campaign to the rally. They used expletives in chants, waved their middle fingers, and made references to the Nazis over megaphones as a line of police stood in front of them.

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Speaking in neighbouring Brampton on Friday night, Trudeau said the campaign couldn't guarantee the safety of the people in attendance, and would have put at risk volunteers and others.

"That was not something I was willing to do," he said.

It was the third such incident Friday where Trudeau was confronted by angry demonstrators

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upset with his government's push on vaccine passports and vaccine mandates for travellers.

Protesters who oppose masks, vaccines and lockdown measures to fight COVID-19 have dogged the Liberal leader on the campaign trail, but he has usually politely waved back and often yelled through his mask, "get vaccinated."

Some have brought their children to yell at Trudeau, with one on Friday night holding an orange sign that read "I need freedom." The crowd cheered when officials announced that Friday's event was cancelled.

Trudeau remarked that he had never seen such anger and intensity on the campaign trail, even recalling going with his father out West where former prime minister Pierre Trudeau was vilified.

He said the current unrest and anger among parts of the population needed to be met with compassion, but added that science has pointed to vaccinations as the best way out of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We have to stand strong for what we know to be true. Science is going to help us through this, it is going to be the path forward out of this," Trudeau said. "But we have to make sure we are hearing those real concerns and responding to them as best we can."

The Conservatives in a statement condemned the use of obscene and extreme language by some protesting Trudeau's appearances.

"Many families, some with young children, attend events such as these. It should be a positive experience, whatever their political affiliation," the campaign said in a tweet.

NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh tweeted out that everyone deserves to be safe on the campaign trail.

"I am very sorry to hear this happened tonight to Mr. Trudeau and the Liberal team and I hope that everyone is OK," he wrote.

It was an uncomfortable end to the second week of the campaign where health issues dominated the day's debate. The Liberals stressed the importance of vaccination against

COVID-19, the Conservatives pledged to enhance benefits for seriously ill workers and the NDP outlined a prescription for universal pharmacare.

During a stop in Mississauga, Ont., Trudeau said a re-elected Liberal government would procure enough vaccines to ensure all Canadians have access to free COVID-19 booster shots and any needed second-generation vaccines.

Trudeau also promised a \$1-billion fund to assist provinces and territories that usher in a requirement for proof-of-vaccine credentials for non-essential businesses, such as restaurants and gyms, as well as public spaces.

"A vaccine mandate for non-essential businesses is a good idea," Trudeau said during his appearance at a restaurant.

However, Trudeau did not provide a direct answer when asked if he had special permission for more than the provincial limit of 25 people to crowd into the restaurant for his announcement.

British Columbia, Manitoba and Quebec are moving ahead with so-called vaccine passports, and Trudeau said he hoped Doug Ford would follow, saying it was time for Ontario's Progressive Conservative premier to listen to public health officials.

The Canadian Press learned later Friday that Ontario has plans to introduce a vaccine certificate system next week, a reversal from Ford's early claims that such a system would "split society."

Visiting Thunder Bay, Ont., Singh called on the federal government to issue a national vaccine credential.

"Wouldn't it be easier to just have one central document that we get from the federal government and we can use in any province we travel to?" Singh said. "It would just make life easier."

In Corner Brook, N.L., Conservative Leader Erin O'Toole said he would increase employment insurance benefits for ailing workers to 52 weeks from 26, a move that could help people fight life-threatening diseases like cancer.

"Canadian workers should know we have their backs if they become seriously ill," O'Toole said.

"I'm sure that we have all known someone, a friend, a relative who has battled cancer. We all know how devastating it is. So, we can all imagine if, on top of all that, you also had to worry that your EI benefits were running out, and that you might not be able to put food on the table for your family."

Singh pledged Friday to begin working with provinces immediately to deliver a single-payer, public pharmacare program for all Canadians.

The New Democrats say millions can't afford to take the medications they need and must skip doses, cut their pills in half, or even go without them.

"We know it doesn't have to be this way," Singh said. "We know that we can actually work together to solve this problem."

This report by The Canadian Press was first published Aug. 27, 2021.

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Protesters wait for Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau to arrive at a campaign event in Bolton, Ont. on Friday, Aug. 27, 2021. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Sean Kilpatrick

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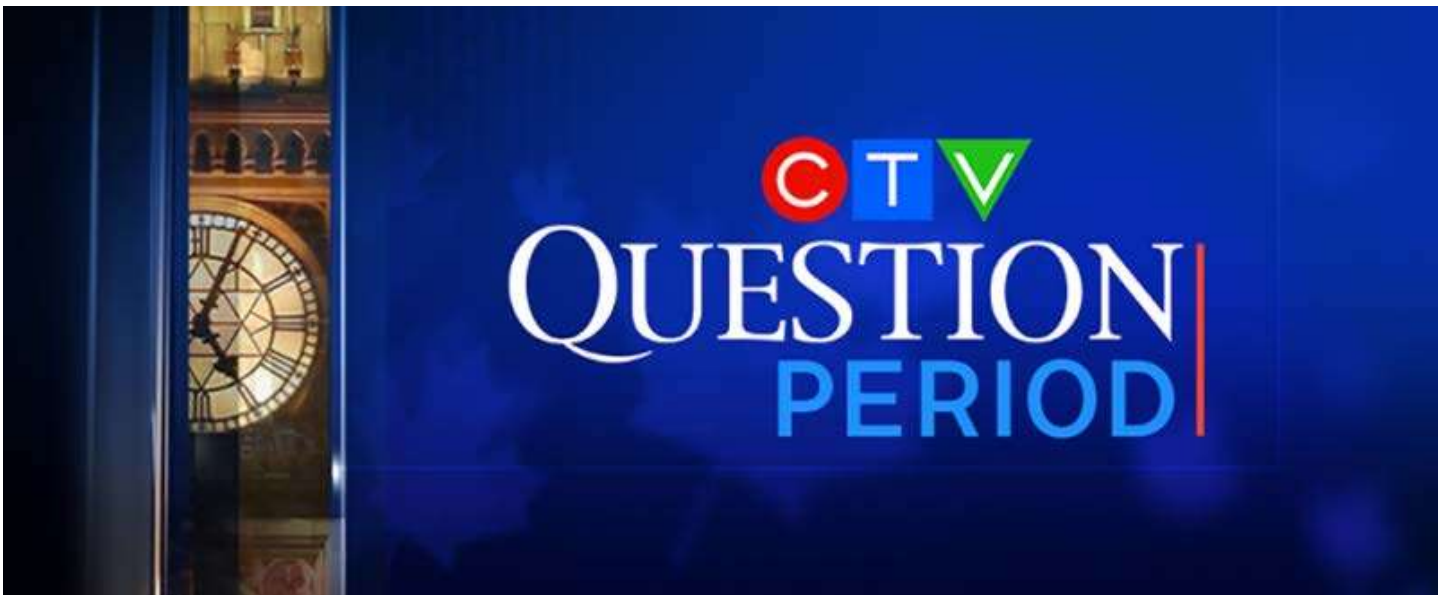
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